



Wyoming Department of Agriculture

2219 Carey Ave., Cheyenne, WY 82002 ■ Phone: 307-777-7321 ■ Fax: 307-777-6593
E-mail: wda1.state.wy.us ■ Website: wyagric.state.wy.us

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John Etchepare, Director

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November 24, 2004

U.S. Forest Service
North Zone – Shoshone National Forest
203A Yellowstone Ave.
Cody, WY 82414-9313

To the Shoshone National Forest:

Following are the comments from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture (WDA) on the proposed vegetation management and hazardous fuels reduction activities to address the management needs in the Lower Wood River area of the Shoshone National Forest.

Our comments are specific to our mission within state government which is to be dedicated to the promotion and enhancement of Wyoming's agriculture, natural resources, and quality of life. As these amendments will have major impacts upon our agriculture industry, our natural resources, and the welfare of our citizens, we believe it's important that we be kept informed of proposed actions and decisions and that we continue to be provided the opportunity to express pertinent issues and concerns.

The WDA is in support of the forest managers in addressing the concerns over declining forest conditions. We support the effort to address concerns about hazardous fuels and increasing wildfire risk. Livestock grazing can be used as a critically important resource management tool to manipulate the range resource toward a desired condition.

Livestock grazing, in addition to providing forage for livestock, can be used to change the seral stage of the plant community, remove decadent plant growth to rejuvenate forage species, and improve the quality of forage for wildlife. Livestock grazing is an excellent tool for the reduction of hazardous fine fuels, thus reducing the potential for catastrophic wildfire and improving the wildland/urban interface. This grazing will also aid in the disappearance of noxious weeds and invasive species.

Private ranch land relies on federal grazing for social and economic productivity. The ability for ranchers to graze federal lands is critical for their operation to remain economically viable. This is a very important issue, as the impacts of subdividing private ranch land in the surrounding area will have an extreme-demonstrative effect on the wildlife populations, their prey base, and available open space and habitat. This subdivision of private ranchland is far worse on the ecosystem, especially when compared to the minuscule utilization of forage by livestock in an allotment. If grazing permits are removed, the Forest Service can count on the eventual removal of habitat on

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Lower Wood River Vegetation Management

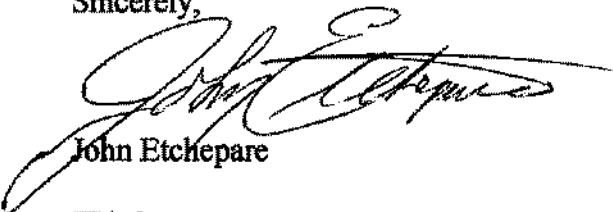
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the private ranchland. Please ensure that your efforts will not have a significant adverse financial impact on ranching, and therefore, a potentially devastating impact on wildlife and the natural resource base.

Again, we support the efforts of the Shoshone National Forest to address the forest conditions and recommend that forest health be improved by continuing livestock grazing.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Etchepare", with a stylized, flowing script.

John Etchepare

JE/mh

CC: Governor's Planning Office
Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation
Wyoming Stock Growers Association
Wyoming Wool Growers Association
Wyoming Game and Fish Department